
Martin Edmonds and Michael M. Tsai (eds.),
Defending Taiwan. The Future Vision of Taiwan's
Defence Policy and Military Strategy

London, New York, RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, 284 p.

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NOTE DE L'ÉDITEUR

Translated from the French original by Peter Brown

- 1 This is an important book, filling as it does a glaring gap for anyone interested in the China-Taiwan equation, that of the analysis of the Taiwanese armed forces. Admittedly, some writers, like Michael Swaine, have published on the subject¹, but such studies still remain all too few and far between. One of the reasons for this scarcity, besides the waning interest in Taiwan, is the continuing impenetrableness of the Taiwanese military institution, and this despite more than a decade and a half of democratisation.
- 2 We should therefore welcome this collective work with open arms. This volume is the fruit of an international conference organised by this journal in 2001 and whose contributions were updated before being published in 2003. It prolongs and perpetuates the effort to provide information and analysis made by the bilingual journal *Taiwan Defense Affairs* (*Guofang zhengce pinglun*), launched in 2000 by the Progressive Democratic Party member of parliament Michael Tsai Ming-hsien, one of the two editors of *Defending Taiwan*.
- 3 The book is divided into five parts, the most innovative of which are the central three (II, III and IV). The first part paints a useful, albeit rather well-known picture of Taiwan's security environment. In the first chapter, Kao-cheng Wang, of the University of Tam Kang (Danjiang), reminds us of the new security challenge for the United States

resulting from the emergence of China. In the second chapter, Denny Roy, who became known for his work on the history of Taiwan, gives an assessment of the modernisation and rise to power of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), in particular in terms of the information war, and its impact on the situation in the straits of Taiwan.

- 4 The second part will probably be of greater usefulness for many readers. First of all, Chih-heng Yang, a scholar at the Taiwan Research Institute, a think tank close to the former President Lee Teng-hui, recounts the necessary adaptation of Taiwan's military strategy to the new situation in the strait. Damon Bristow, a former member of the Royal United Services Institute (UK), then gives an appraisal of the modernisation of national defence and identifies the main hurdles encountered (tensions between the various services, the advantage that has long been given to the army, the policy of procurement and integration of equipment, and recruitment, training and morale).
- 5 However, this modernisation is in fact well underway, as shown in the third part of the work. In a short but very instructive chapter, Jung-chuan Liu, of the Taiwanese University of National Defence, presents the main objectives of this process, which can be summarised in two main ideas: the adaptation of the armed forces to modern warfare and the implementation of a strategy of "active defence" designed to dissuade any attack. Chien Chung, a renowned expert on the Taiwanese army at Tsinghua (Hsinchu) University, analyses the effort undertaken by the navy, while Tony Mason, of the University of Birmingham, does likewise concerning the air-force. It is clear that the priority given to these two forces since the late 1980s means that they would play a decisive role in any defence of the island.
- 6 The fourth part tackles more difficult and controversial questions, in particular the matter of antimissile defence. This is a necessary response to the growing threat of Chinese missiles, but one whose effectiveness remains largely psychological (Patriot) or dependent on American plans regionally or globally². This is why Ming-hsien Wong, of Tam Kang University, examines the means for taking the high ground (confidence measures, for example) to get out of the weapons race presently underway in North-East Asia.
- 7 However, the development of army-nation relations is no less important. The book's final two chapters amount to a plea both for the opening up of the military to society and the professionalisation of the armed forces. Clearly, Taiwan is today facing a dilemma: on the one hand, this state has an urgent need to strengthen the army-nation connection, the only real guarantee of the maintenance of a spirit of defence, and on the other, in order to improve the credibility of the military machine, it must gradually abandon the institution of compulsory military service (20 months today) and evolve towards a regular army capable of maximising the use of costly equipment it has at its disposal and, consequently, of dissuading any aggressor from venturing into the Taiwan Strait.
- 8 The *de facto* independence and, indeed, the survival of the Republic of China on Taiwan come at this cost. *Defending Taiwan* shows the difficulties of the exercise, but this work also brings to light the gradual dawning of awareness of the challenges that the Taiwanese nation is facing today: for is it not by the soundness of the spirit of defence that the strength of any nationalism, and in particular that of Taiwanese nationalism, can be judged *in fine*?

NOTES

1. *Deterring Conflict in the Taiwan Strait : The Successes and Failures of Taiwan's Defense Reform and Modernization Program*, Washington DC, Carnegie Papers, No. 46, July 2004, 31 p.
2. Theater Missile Defense (TMD), National Missile Defense (NMD).